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House of Representatives

PASS THE MILITARY SURVIVOR

BENEFIT PLAN

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Speaker and colleagues, I rise today to speak about a military widow in my Congressional District who has written to me about her Military Survivor Benefits Plan, known as SBP.

She writes: "My husband, who served in the Army for 20 years, died in July, 1995. I was then 61 years old. I was doing okay, paying my monthly bills and having enough left for groceries, but when I turned 62, I was notified my SBP was reduced from \$476 to \$302. What a shock! This was my grocery money they took from me. I hope that nobody else has to go through what I have. I cry every day and night. Not only have I lost my husband, I lost my money, my pride, my dignity." These words from the widow of one of our nation's veterans should be seared into the mind of every member of Congress.

Tomorrow, along with a number of my colleagues, I will be signing a discharge petition for H.R. 303, a bill to provide what is known as concurrent receipt to our disabled military retirees. If this law is

passed, these retirees would be able to receive both their military retired pay, which they earned, and their VA disability compensation, which they deserve! As you know, both the House and the Senate passed concurrent receipt during the last session of Congress--and only in the Conference, was it diluted to almost nothing. We are again fighting to correct this grave injustice.

I am here today to state that there is another equally deserving group that we must include in this fight--the widows of our military retirees! Not only are many of our military retirees being denied their rightful benefits while they are alive, their spouses are being denied their rightful benefits upon their death.

The law to reduce the benefits received by military retired widows when they turn 65 is misleading and unfair. It is time to change this law! Most of these military widows are living on small incomes, but even people with substantial incomes would have a tough time coping with a reduction from 55 percent of their retirement benefits to 35 percent.

My bill, H.R. 1592, the Military Survivors Equity Act, would immediately eliminate this callous and absurd reduction in benefits that now burdens our military widows. My colleague from Florida, Mr. Miller, has introduced H.R. 548, a bill that would increase the post-62 SBP annuity so that it reaches 55 percent of the military retired pay by 2007. Both bills fulfill the 2001 "sense of Congress" resolution to reduce and eventually eliminate this SBP reduction. The passage of this legislation is a top priority for the Military Officers Association of America, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars has also voiced their

support for these bills. The Democratic Salute to Veterans and the Armed Forces legislative package, recently released, also calls for an end to this unfair reduction of benefits.

I encourage members from both sides of the aisle to work with Congressman Miller and me to stop the pain and anguish we are causing our military widows and to show respect for the tremendous sacrifices made by our veterans and their families. We must pass this legislation to make this the compassionate and effective Survivors Benefits Plan it should be.